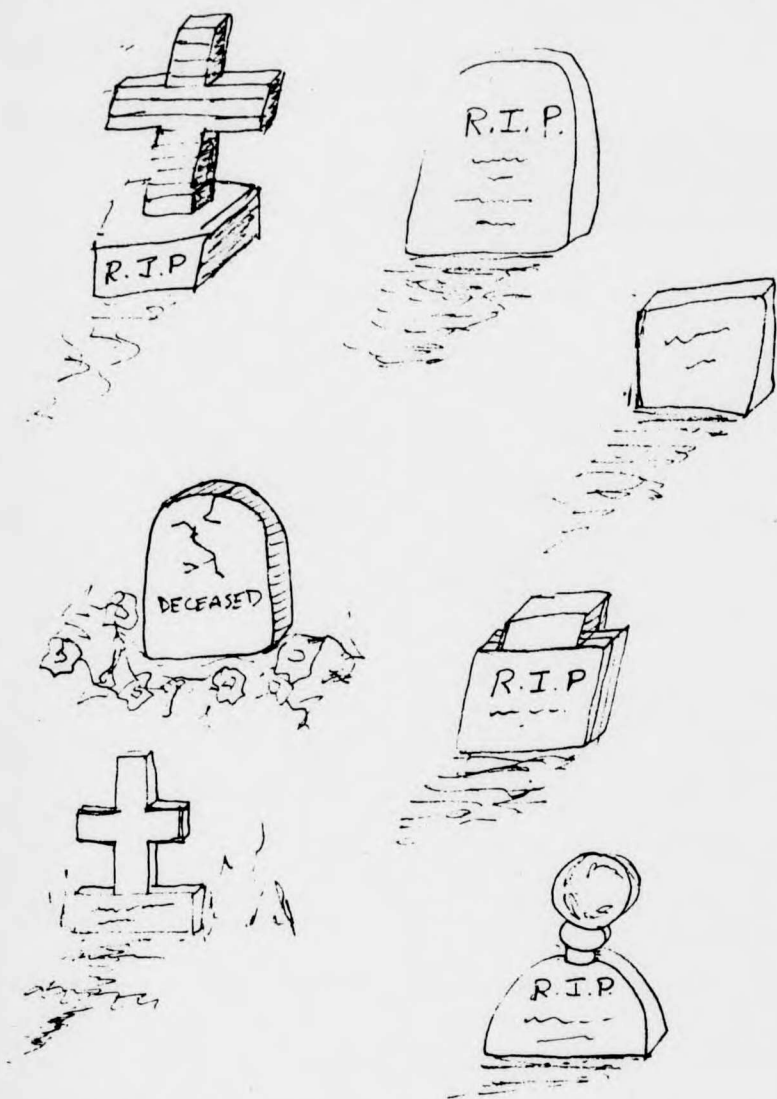


# Conversation with a grave digger



rushing along the Yonge corridor had a wicked bite to it. My face felt anaesthetized.

He wore a worn-out, rust coloured ski jacket, and shuffled his feet impatiently, cursing at the little red hand of authority on the pedestrian light.

It occurred to me to say something. This is what came out, "Takes a long time, doesn't it?"

"Aw, mumble-mumble-goddamn cold-mumble-fuckin'-mumble—" he complained, with the slur of a man who is missing the teeth that make enunciation possible. Just then I identified the package he was carrying: it was a six pack of Labatt's Blue.

"I think you'll be alright," I said, gesturing at his case of beer. "You've got that to look forward to."

"Yeah, well, tonight's my one night off. Gotta work this weekend."

"That's no good," I said. The pedestrian signal finally changed, now flashing the little yellow fellow with the stiff awkward posture that is supposed to suggest movement. "Is your work hard?" I asked. Although there was a lively, compact toughness about him, the man was clearly not young. I guessed him to be, perhaps, 62.

"It's outdoor work. I've always done work."

"Groundskeeping?"

"Nope. The cemetery just down Yonge. That's where I work."

"Oh. So you sort of look after the tombs, make sure the place looks alright —"

"Sure, yeah, look after the plots, landscape, stuff like that. I do burial things, too."

The conversation continued along Patricia Avenue. We crunched along the sidewalk; he looked ahead of him, I alternately watched my feet and glanced over at his face. [I tend to ask questions and then use listening to the response as an excuse to study people — possibly a revolutionary approach in a city where eye contact among strangers is viewed as a prelude to either a drug deal or a pick-up.]

## Sometimes, I think everyone should work in a cemetery.

I learned all about mausoleums, which are basically, an ornate housing complex for dead people. When a cemetery becomes too crowded, the space afforded by mausoleums becomes terribly valuable. In certain cases, cemetery officials will, in fact, dig up someone (with the family's written consent, of course) and restore them in the more communal confines of the mausoleum. Harvey Dolby has taken part in this process. Corpses are his job. I've never even seen a dead person.

"Wow," I said, kicking a chunk of snow in front of me. "You must have... well, a different perspective on death than most of us have."

"Sure do. I buried my own wife in that place."

"I'm sorry. Has this been — was this — did this happen recently?"

"Eight years ago."

"I see. Not that it matters when it happened." What I had wanted to say was that the pain of a loved one's death does not necessarily diminish with time.

Having worked in a cemetery for all his adult life, Harvey has been reminded of human mortality with numbing regularity, I suppose. The evening I met him, he admitted to feelings of ambiguity regarding death. He was able to work comfortably with the bodies of elderly people who'd lived, aged, and then died naturally. "But then, when you get the young people, the children," he said slowly, "you never get used to that."

Just a block and a half from where I live, the man slowed down and stepped off the sidewalk towards a ragged peeling house that my housemates and I, from our earliest explorations of our neighbourhood, had dubbed The Haunted House. "This is it. Home," he said. "I rent this place with a bunch of other guys. That's my old shit-box parked out front. Needs some work." I had a shit-box myself, so we talked about cars for a moment. Before parting, we shook hands and introduced ourselves.

Sometimes, I think everyone should work in a cemetery. Perhaps we've been wrong all along, shielding ourselves from the natural event of death, passing our mothers and fathers over to professionals so that we don't have to deal with their absence of being. After all, we don't cover the faces of our dead for the sake of their dignity.

by Stephen Mitchell

The night I met Harvey Dolby, the two of us were waiting to cross Yonge Street at the Patricia Avenue intersection. I didn't know him. He

didn't know me. It was a Friday night.

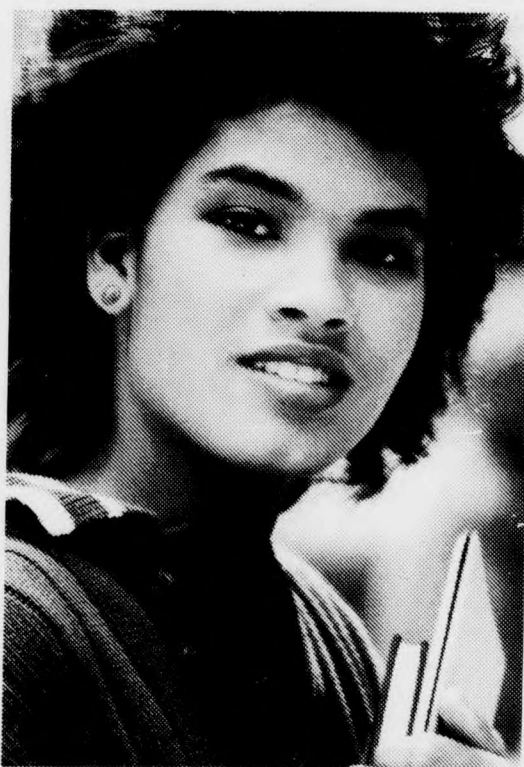
The pedestrian signal appeared to be jammed. Cars whizzed by, mercilessly lashing the two of us with shards of ice. The winter air

**Excalibur, York University's community newspaper, is now accepting applications for the position of editor-in-chief for the 1990-1991 publishing year. All members of the York community are welcome to apply for this full-time position. Submit a resume and a statement outlining your plans for the newspaper to the CRO, 111 Central Square by March 15, 1990 at 4:00 p.m.**

### Retraction

Ed Kim withdraws the statement published in the March 1 issue of *Excalibur* about the behaviour of CYSF equality commissioner Brian Archdekin. Kim apologizes for any offense this may have caused.

## "I'M GETTING GOOD GRADES — AND A GREAT RESUME."



"I need two things to get through school: good grades and money. I can take care of the first by myself, and UPS is helping me take care of the second. They gave me a part-time job that really pays."

"I make almost \$10,000 a year for working about 4 hours a day, five days a week. But get this, I'm also entitled to medical, vision and dental benefits. As well as paid holidays and vacations."

"I got to choose from a variety of shifts that could easily fit into my schedule. Most jobs are in Operations. But there are students working in Accounting, Industrial Engineering, I.S. and Customer Service, too."

"Think of it — great pay and even the opportunity to advance into management (part-time or full-time). It'll look great on a resume, and even better on a bank statement."

**Openings exist at UPS 2900 Steeles Avenue West, Concorde (Steeles at Jane). Apply in person. Monday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. We are an Employment Equity Employer.**



**WORKING FOR STUDENTS WHO WORK FOR US.  
UPS DELIVERS EDUCATION**